

Today, I made the following statement expressing my condolences to the people of Australia for the loss of lives and destruction of property due to the worst flooding in half a century:

“M. Speaker, I rise to express my condolences for the loss of life and destruction of property that is occurring in Australia’s northern State of Queensland, as a consequence of the worst floods in half a century. The flood, which has affected three-quarters of Queensland, has killed 20 residents and resulted in thousands of people being evacuated from their homes and businesses.

“The steady rain that fell for days before Christmas caused rivers to swell and inundated 22 cities and towns. The Australian National Climate Centre has predicted that the region is highly likely to receive even more than average rainfall from now until the end of March, when the full impact of a strong La Nina cycle will be felt. Estimates of the number of Queenslanders affected go as high as 200,000. States of natural disaster have been declared in 41 of Queensland’s 73 municipalities and more than 11,000 people have been evacuated. In addition, the floods have cut off food supplies to communities in the north including Townsville, Cairns and many indigenous communities.

“Economists predict that the floods will have an impact on the national GDP of between 0.25 percent and 0.5 percent, or \$3 billion to \$6 billion, with the mining and agricultural industries affected the most. Half of the state’s agricultural crops have been destroyed, coal deliveries have been halted, and mines shut. The international economy will likely feel this economic burden because Queensland supplies half of the world’s cooking coal for steel manufacturing, which accounts for about two-thirds of the global trade. The Premier of Queensland and Australia’s Prime Minister have announced additional disaster relief assistance to help small businesses and primary producers that have been impacted.

“Encouragingly, the size of the tragedy has been matched by the size and speed of the response, but the long-term impact is yet to be determined. It will be a long wait before the massive amount of water recedes and the recovery process starts, involving the resurfacing of roads, reconnecting of power and repairing of infrastructure – all requiring an unparalleled rebuilding effort. I extend my sincere appreciation to the emergency service personnel, army and air force crews, volunteers, and Australia’s Federal and Queensland governments for their well coordinated response to this disaster. The loss suffered would have been far greater without the skill, dedication, compassion, and sacrifice of these emergency responders.

“M. Speaker, the floods in northern Australia is a major natural disaster and has caused loss and destruction on a catastrophic scale. I want to send a message of condolence to those Australian families who have lost lives and livelihoods. Australia is and always will be an important ally and friend to the United States. The Australian people will truly be in my thoughts and prayers over the coming weeks. I wish the affected communities the very best as they rebuild their lives and communities.”